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ABSTRACT

The "Star Wars" trilogy is a fairy tale projected into the future which exemplifies in a clear-cut manner many of the archetypes of Jungian psychology. These films are modern retellings of ancient myths. Carl Jung has described myths as "fundamental expressions of human nature." In the films, fairy tale motifs such as typical clothing, helpful animals, knights, princess, emperor, Millenium Falcon, combined with primordial settings, are projected into the future with star ships, death stars and light swords. Although the films take the spectator far into the future, connections to an unconscious past are never forgotten. The popularity of these films could be attributed not only to the actors, special effects, and adventure but also to the connections with the collective and personal unconscious which the trilogy continually provokes. (SG)

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THE MYTH AND MAGIC OF STAR WARS:
A JUNGIAN INTERPRETATION

by Maurice Phipps

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SYNOPSIS

This paper explores the psychology in Jungian terms of Star Wars. The Star Wars trilogy illustrates these concepts in a clear-cut manner giving many examples of the archetype of our unconscious.

Attention is also drawn to the use of old-style fairy tale motifs such as clothing, helpful animals, princess, emperor, Millenium Falcon, etc. This combined with primordial settings is projected into the future with star ships, death stars, and light swords.

The connections to our collective and personal unconscious are continually provoked throughout the trilogy.

According to Jung, a pattern occurs in the historic myths and dreams of modern man. The archetypes featuring in these myths and dreams emerge from the collective unconscious of the human race. The Star Wars trilogy is a fairy tale projected into the future which exemplifies, in a clear-cut manner, many of the archetypes of Jungian Psychology. It illustrates for us the symbolism portrayed in the old fairy tales and some of our dreams.

On the surface, links to the fairy tales we know of the past are established through the use of swords, cloaks, lords, princesses and knights. These integrate the old fairy tale images with the new space fantasy. Albeit the swords of yesteryear are now new light sabres, the symbolism remains that of a medieval sword. Looking at the clothing, we reminisce back to the days of old, indirectly in some cases, such as the armor worn by Darth Vader (the Black Knight) and the soldiers of the Empire, and directly with Luke, Han and Ben Obi-wan Kenobi's dress, which could be straight from an old-style fairy tale. The name of Solo's starship, the "Millenium Falcon," further perpetuates that we are connected to the old myths and the knights of old. The connection is further confirmed with the survival of the rebels depending on the Jedi Knights -- Obi-wan Kenobi, Luke and, in reserve, Princess Leia (a new mythological twist), fighting the Evil Emperor and the Black Knight, Darth Vader. This is a common fairy tale plot. I mention Princess Leia as a new twist because the princesses of old rarely took to fighting; they were generally just rescued. Modern women's emancipation has projected into this futuristic fairy tale a spirited female who enters into the fray and often takes a leading role (yet still doesn't get to fly the X or Y wings or the starships). Perhaps this is a reflection of the change in our collective unconscious.

There aren't many traditional castles in the story. The exception to this

is Jabba the Hutt's abode which shows the classic features of the exterior and interior of an old castle, complete with dungeon, monster, portcullis, trapdoor and a revolutionary style trophy, a "carbonized" Hans Solo. Other fortresses, however, include the Death Star and the battle cruiser starships.

Another distinct link with the past is the use of the desert landscape followed by the snow and ice and the primeval forest of the last of the trilogy, all with their appropriate monsters. There is no shortage of monsters, a good example being Jabba the Hutt, who chains the princess to his side and throws Luke to his own pet monster. "Again and again in fairy tales we encounter the motif of helpful animals."¹ Star Wars abounds with examples such as Chewbacca the "Wookie" and in the final episode the "Ewoks," who join forces with the rebels. The inclusion of these images, some of which are semi-human, could have developed as primordial images during the development of the human brain and human consciousness from the animal state. These inherited archaic vestiges of the psyche emerge from the collective unconscious and there are many examples in mythology. Thus, we are taken far into the future, but we are never allowed to forget the connections to our unconscious past.

"In another galaxy in another time...;" the stage is set. Luke Skywalker becomes involved with the rebel cause and is committed to fight the Evil Empire to avenge his uncle. Within no time, he meets the hold hermit Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi, two robots, Hans Solo and the semi-human Wookie who all take to the stars in Solo's ship, the "Millenium Falcon." They are drawn into the Death Star, the latest fortress and force of destruction of the Evil Empire, but manage to rescue Princess Leia, who has been withstanding torture from Darth Vader, "The Dark Lord." He wants to get from her the secret plans of the rebel

cause to destroy the Death Star.

Ben Obi-wan Kenobi proves to be a Jedi Knight, and encourages Luke to use his inner power, the "Force," which he unknowingly has. Ben dies during a fight with Darth Vader, but then spiritually helps Luke, who realizes he must train to be a Jedi Knight to replace Ben. This training is done by old Yoda, a dwarfish character who develops Luke mentally and physically using the "Force." The Death Star is destroyed when Luke allows the "Force" to assist him during the attack.

Some time later, the Empire discovers the whereabouts of the rebels and attacks their base. After escaping the attack, Luke flies to Yoda, who organizes the training necessary to become a "Jedi." However, Luke foresees, with his newly-acquired powers, that his friends escaped into a trap, so he insists on leaving before he is fully fledged to help against the advice of both Yoda and the spirit of Obi-wan Kenobi. He falls into the same trap and fights Darth Vader, who tells him that he is his father. This shocks Luke, and Vader presses the attack, cutting off Luke's hand. Luke falls into a pit, but is eventually rescued by his friends who have escaped. Solo, however, has not, and has been encased in "Carbonite."

Luke, using the "force," rescues Solo from the monstrous Jabba the Hutt, for whom he had hung as a carbonite decoration. Luke returns to Yoda, who informs him that he is now a Jedi Knight before he dies to join Obi-wan Kenobi. They both continue to help Luke spiritually.

The Empire builds another Death Star on which is both Darth Vader and the Emperor. They lure Luke and the rebels into another trap. The rebels, though, are helped by the "Ewoks," small teddy bear-type animals, and Luke overcomes his

temptations to join his father and the Emperor in the Dark Side. He is almost killed by the Emperor, but his father overcomes his bondage to the Dark Side and kills the Emperor, saving Luke. On removing Vader's mask, Luke releases his father's ties to the dark forces, allowing Vader to die as a man of love.

The rebels then destroy the partially-built Death Star, but Luke doesn't share the others' happiness because of his father's death. Leia, who is his sister, takes him back to the others.

Jung considers myths to be "fundamental expressions of human nature" and that the spirit and creativity of the myth, allied with the content and feelings it expresses, come from the collective unconscious. "The archetypes are experienced as emotions as well as images, and their effect is particularly noticeable in typical and significant human situations such as birth and death, triumph over natural obstacles, transitional stages of life, extreme danger or awe-inspiring experiences."² Luke Skywalker provides us with the hero archetype, the story gives us archetypes on different levels, however -- Luke as a hero and Luke's own archetypes such as his shadow represented by Darth Vader and the spirit represented by the "Force." The hero archetype is the most common myth and is found in classical mythology, the Far East, the Middle Ages, primitive tribes and our more recent fairy tales. "In many stories, the early weaknesses of the hero are balanced by the appearance of strong tutelary figures or guardians who enable him to perform the superhuman tasks that he cannot accomplish unaided."³ These figures represent the fuller identity of the hero giving the strength that the personal ego lacks. They often take the form of the "Wise Old Man," but in this adventure, both Ben Obi-wan Kenobi and Yoda assist Luke in this way.

These strength-giving voices of the unconscious often come in crises as Luke often received them; such messages are not programmed by our conscious mind. Luke learns to accomplish superhuman tasks as he trains to be a Jedi Knight; this training represents his journey through individuation.

The hero archetype helps the development of the ego-consciousness, giving the strength to enable the coping of life's tasks. This development goes through cycles demonstrated by Luke's impatience and lack of purpose in his early training, which he eventually masters and develops. The archetypal "Fall of the Hero" is illustrated when Luke shows his impatience. Luke, even though he is shown through negative teachings of Yoda that he is not the true hero as he has not reached his status as a Jedi Knight, insists on leaving prematurely to effect a rescue that had he been a Jedi would have been more feasible. His persona was the hero, he wasn't "grounded" and his inflated ego took him away. However, this rise in his hero archetype crashes as the rescue attempt leads him to a trap. He also loses his hand in the fight with Darth Vader and falls into a chasmous pit, symbolically representing what happens to the inflated hero archetype, the eventual, inevitable fall whereas the true hero would recognize that he is still human with ordinary characteristics and remain grounded. Luke becomes grounded by his fall and is rescued by his friends and realizes that he still has to progress through his individuation or growth to become a Jedi.

Dr. Paul Radin suggests four actual stages in the cycle of the hero, the last being the twins cycle. "The two representing the two sides of man's nature."⁴ He maintains that they represent the extrovert and introvert in their personality -- one acquiescent, mild and with initiative; the other dynamic and rebellious. An interesting development of this theme in "Return of the Jedi" is

that Princess Leia, who also plays a hero role, is Luke's twin sister, so we have represented a male and female hero. Princess Leia acts as a mediator between the two male heroes, Luke and Hans Solo. She is a "femme inspiratrice" and in the psychological terms of the four types of women, a hetaira, mediating, but also being a companion on any level and, of course, a hero.

According to Jung, striving for wholeness is the goal of individuation, the separation from the archetypes and complexes, which are unconscious and, therefore, inhibit the development of the self. While individuating we develop four functions which reflect our personality -- a superior function, two auxiliary functions and the inferior function. These functions are thinking, intuition, sensation and feeling reflecting the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual sides of ourselves. The dominant function determines our personality. The inferior function should be developed through the auxiliary functions to bring it out of the personal shadow. We are all often in conflict with our shadow and the conflict in Star Wars is between the hero and evil personified by Darth Vader, the Death Star and the Emperor. In particular, Darth Vader personifies the dark side of Luke's shadow. This is illustrated when Luke finds it hard to face the Darth Vader image in the cave when training with Yoda. Darth Vader always wears a mask, making him faceless, and is dressed in black, a classic representation of the dark side of the shadow figure and a force of evil. A further connection between Luke and Darth Vader is made when we find out that Vader is Luke's father. The dark sides of them both are represented by fear, anger and aggression. Yoda's concern is that the dark side of the force is "easier, quicker and more seductive."⁵ The Emperor, in the final stages, plays on this to try to turn Luke, who recognizes his dark side

and refuses to play it out. Luke notes how much he could be like his father as he sees Vadar's mechanical hand, the same as his own. The missing hand illustrates a triad, a missing extremity from the normal four. The four extremities symbolize the four functions and wholeness. The unconscious holds on to the inferior function symbolized here by the severed hand of Luke and his shadow, Darth Vadar, preventing their wholeness. There is often a connection between the fourth function and evil; evil usually manifests itself through the fourth or inferior function. "Taking individual responsibility for our own personal shadow is a small attainable achievement, although it demands a lifetime's determination and courage."⁶ Luke succeeds in doing this triumphantly overcoming the evil manifestations of his inferior fourth function.

Darth Vadar's mask is the representation of his persona; the outward side or mask shown to the world in which he is imprisoned having turned to the dark side for so long. Maintaining the persona for so long had trapped him in that role. This imprisonment, where his life and soul were no longer his own, was lifted eventually by Luke, who removed Vadar's persona by taking the mask away, revealing the sad, loving face of the inner man. Luke found the light spot in Darth Vadar's shadow, enabling Vadar to break the bondage with his persona so he could kill the Emperor and save Luke. The persona is an essential part of us that enables us to perform our everyday lives; however, if the persona becomes the self, it has taken over our personality, as it did with Darth Vadar, who lived his persona totally, unable to dialogue with his conscious self; the unconscious dark side was almost completely in control. "Human nature is not consistent; yet filling a role it must appear so and is, therefore, inevitably falsified. The persona is, however, a necessity; through it we relate to our

world. It simplifies our contacts by indicating what we may expect from other people and on the whole makes them pleasant."⁷

The Princess doesn't take the traditional role, however, as she is as involved in the fighting as anyone, taking the initiative and lead on many occasions, which is a more modern female role. True to the form of many fairy tales, though, she falls in love with the "common" man, Solo, who was a smuggler with self-interest as his dark side. This is reflected by his name. He overcomes his dark side to be at Princess Leia's side. This is a link with the reality of the ordinary world and the magical, the smuggler joining with the princess in extraordinary forces of heroism. The "Force" is shared by the Jedi Knights battling it out with the Evil Empire. This tension of opposites is the mainspring of the whole drama, the forces of good and evil. The "Force" or archetype of the spirit is capable of working good as well as evil, but it depends upon man's free will -- i.e., conscious decision whether the good also will be permeated into something satanic.⁸ It is a symbolic representation of our own energy force which enables us to grow and individuate towards wholeness. One of the final quotes of the story when Luke is drawn back into the group at the end by Leia exhibits this symbol of wholeness by the geometric symbol of wholeness, the circle, coupling in this case the "Force" and relationships. "Leia takes him back to the others, back to the warm circle of their love."⁹

The popularity of Star Wars could be attributed to not only the actors, special effects and adventure, but to the connections with our collective and personal unconscious which the trilogy continually provokes.

FOOTNOTES

¹Jung, C.G. Psyche and Symbol, edited by Violet S. De Laszlio. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books), 1958, p. 87.

²Fordham, F. Introduction to Jung's Psychology. (New York: Chaucer Press, Penguin), 1981, p. 25.

³Jung, C.G. Man and His Symbols. (New York: Dell Publishing), 1964, p. 101.

⁴Ibid., p. 106.

⁵Lucas, G. The Empire Strikes Back, edited by Eleanor Erhardt. (New York: Random House).

⁶Claremont de Castillejo. Knowing Woman: a Feminine Psychology. (New York: Harper Row), 1974, p. 43.

⁷Fordham, F. op cit., p. 48.

⁸Jung, C.G. Psyche and Symbol, op cit., p. 112.

⁹Lucas, G. Return of the Jedi, edited by Joan D. Vinge. (New York: Random House).

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